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SUBJECT: JORDAN: DEVELOPMENTS IN TRIAL OF SUSPECTS IN 2002  
MA'AN UPRISING

REF: A. AMMAN 470

[1](#)B. 04 AMMAN 10304

[1](#)1. (U) The highly contentious trial of more than 100 Jordanians charged with involvement in the 2002 disorders in the southern city of Ma'an proceeded in Jordan's State Security Court this week. Eight of the 14 in custody on June 5 retracted their earlier confessions, which they said were extracted under duress (ref A). "I was subjected to constant torture for three days by security forces and was forced to confess to something I did not do," the main defendant in the case, Mohammad Ahmad al-Shalabi (aka Abu Sayyaf) told the court. "I didn't possess any illegal weapons or explosives, neither did I plot subversive acts against American interests in Jordan, nor did I shoot at any police officer in Ma'an during the riots." (Note: Abu Sayyaf was previously convicted on weapons charges for a separate plot targeting U.S. interests in Jordan (ref B). End Note.).

[1](#)2. (U) The prosecution is working its way down a long list of witnesses, including a police officer who testified that Abu Sayyaf in October 2002 threatened to blow him up if he arrested him. "Shalabi was holding a hand grenade in one hand and a pistol in the other, and told me 'if you come near me I will blow myself up and kill you with me,'" Major Samih Ajarmeh, who was head of the Ma'an Criminal Investigation Department at the time of the unrest, told the court. He said that a group of men who were in the area opened fire on him and the accompanying police team, enabling Abu Sayyaf to escape. Another prosecution witness said he examined several rocket-propelled grenades and two hand grenades allegedly seized from the rioters, claiming they were primed for use. The former chief of the Ma'an City Police Department told the court that two of the defendants had fired on police with machine guns during the riots. The disturbances left six people, including two police officers, dead.

[1](#)3. (U) The trial has been marked by discord. At the conclusion of a court session on May 11, military prosecutor Fawaz Etoum asked the court to add Mohammad Abdul Muti to the list of defendants (raising the number in custody to 14), drawing curses and threats from the defendants present in the court room. Defendant Khamis Abu Darwish spat at one of the guards who tried to calm the defendants following the 90-minute session. The court also referred eight prosecution witnesses to the criminal prosecutor on perjury charges after they retracted their previous testimonies. The witnesses, all Ma'an residents, changed their testimony under oath, claiming they were subjected to torture and duress when made to sign written testimonies "which the authorities wrote on their behalf." One witness had previously testified that he had seen two of the defendants shooting at police vehicles during the riots, and that he heard Abu Sayyaf and defendant Majdi Azzam call through loudspeakers for jihad against the police, with Azzam saying "we either live together or we die together." The witness justified his retraction by saying that he did not see or hear the defendants, but was only told about these incidents by other people.

[1](#)4. (U) Tensions related to the trial continued outside of the courtroom, as 32 inmates at the Qafqafa Rehabilitation and Correctional Center began a hunger strike on June 1 to protest the prison's decision to put Abu Sayyaf in solitary confinement for a week. According to Major Bashir Daaja, head of the Public Security Department (PSD) media office: "Abu Sayyaf was disciplined by the prison administration because he cursed and insulted prison guards and instigated others inmates to be disobedient." Daaja said a prison doctor had examined the 32 inmates and they were all listed in good condition, but that Abu Sayyaf refused to be examined by doctors or be taken to the hospital for his routine medical checkup. Abu Sayyaf had claimed during a May 15 court session that he was facing health problems and that prison officials ignored his request to see a doctor. On June 5, the PSD issued a statement saying that Abu Sayyaf had been released from solitary confinement after he and other inmates apologized to the prison warden for a verbal attack on the prison doctor and staff. The trial adjourned on June 5 for a week to allow the defense time to summon its witnesses.

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